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## A FAMILY ALBUM



# A FAMILY ALBUM AND OTHER POEMS

*by*  
ALTER BRODY

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
LOUIS UNTERMEYER



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TO RUSSIA

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## INTRODUCTION

A favorite literary theory (and one which I always defended) concerns the vast amount of remarkable poetic work that is produced in America by poets whose names are known only to the postmaster and the callous clerks who have charge of the rejection slips. If once these inglorious but never mute Miltons could reach their audience, our native literature would develop a sudden and spontaneous power that would rouse the nation and blend our polyglot voices in one homogeneous choir. At least, so I thought. My first shock came when I helped read the manuscripts submitted to the late lamented (by some) *Masses*. True, I became acquainted with a few thousand names I had never seen before; I was made privy to the rhymed and *vers libre* secrets of a generation of publicly intimate young people; I became convinced that every motorman, bill-collector, plumber, minister, travelling salesman and undergraduate had read Whitman and was convinced he could improve upon him. But the fresh, personal and authentic note that should have been so strikingly in evidence was striking only in its absence.

A year or two later *The Seven Arts* was founded, and part of its unwritten programme was based on the hope of discovering new and significant talent. I entered upon my combined duties as advisory editor, second reader and theorist with renewed enthusiasm. But, with two excep-

tions, my experience was almost identically the same as when I performed a similar function a little earlier in my journalistic career. The only new thing I learned was that most of the writers referred to in the previous paragraph seemed to have stopped imitating Whitman and were busy boiling down the psycho-analytic studies of Doctors Freud and Jung. It may be blasphemy these revolutionary days, but it is a fact that the best poetry was submitted by the best known poets.

This was the cheerless conclusion that had been forced upon me the day that a particularly high tower of manuscripts was left on my desk. I remember slitting the envelopes with a certain pity for letter-carriers in general and a contempt for theories in particular. And then my eye was arrested by a few lines signed Alter Brody. I may as well admit that it was the name, with its frank incongruity, that held me first. But it was the brief poem that held me longest. It was called "Lamentations" and it was the sort of poignant picture that persists and grows stronger after the mind has passed to other matters. I took up another poem. Then two more. There were only four sheets (a surprisingly modest amount compared to the quires sent in by most of the clamoring applicants for space) and they were of uneven quality. But in all of them there was revealed a sincerity and sensitivity so keen that they seemed to possess not only the soul but the blood and bones of poetry. In those four poems I caught an intensity that was both racial and individual, an utterance that was no less personal because it caught up the accents of a people.

So with this collection of his poems. What racial significance it has is almost always unconscious. And yet the unifying note is its definitely Semitic undertone—that queer blend of love and hate, brutality and tenderness, cyn-

icism and faith, of a great scorn and a greater suffering. It is this Hebraic power that makes his lines seem to leap hotly from the cold black and white of the printed page. Everywhere in these pages one sees the impress of an alert and original mind, of imagination fed by strengthening fact; of sight that is sharpened by insight. This pungency is seldom absent, but it is most clearly seen in his poems where Brody shows a passionate participation in city life and, at the same time, an apparent detachment from it. Much of this work is an interpretation of industrial activity against a background of ancient dreams; young America seen through the eyes of old Russia. Witness "Kartúshkiya-Beróza" which is, in microcosm, a whole Russian-Jewish boyhood; "Times Square" where one world impinges on another; "Ma," "A Family Album" and "The Neurological Institute" which is a sort of *Spoon River Anthology* of the East Side. The memory of the Ghetto haunts this volume, even Broadway takes on the quality of a seething *Judengasse*.

There is, let me hasten to add, no attempt at reconstruction here. Brody offers no panaceas, no partisan pronouncements; he attempts no propaganda. He is content to record the interplay of environment and heredity, to fix the moment when the fact blossoms into fantasy, to follow the line between realism and rapture. He pierces the superficials of his subjects and goes deep, turning away from nothing that is raw or unpleasant. He does not reject what is usually concealed, knowing that ugliness is as inextricably knit with life as beauty; his poetry seems striving to find the point where what is ugly can be balanced and finally fused with the whole. These occasional discords and suspensions are not only natural but necessary in any work that purports to be a rendering of truth. "Art," this poet

seems to summarize, "is not only a record but a harmonizing of dissonances."

This is what gives Brody's lines such vitality. A dozen poems illustrate his gift of making a picture and then, with a slight turn of phrase, making it come to life. Observe "The Deserted Church," "A Funeral: Italian Quarter," "A City Park," "November"—to name four utterly dissimilar examples. We have, in each of these, the sharp word, the vivid image fused and fired by something warmer and more vivifying than theories of art. It is a personal magic that pervades these young and passionate pages—a magic that is even more haunting for being human. Poetry is almost the last thing that one can be dogmatic about, and yet I am sure that these poems—. . . But it is better that they should speak for themselves.

LOUIS UNTERMAYER.

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## KARTÚSHKIYA-BERÓZA

It is twelve years since I have been there —  
I was born there,  
In the little town, by the river —  
It all comes back to me now  
Reading in the newspaper:  
*“The Germans have seized the bridge-head at Kartúshkiya-Beróza;  
The Russians are retreating in good order across the marshes.  
The town is in flames.”*

Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
Sweet-sounding, time-scented name —  
Smelling of wide-extending marshes of hay;  
Smelling of cornfields;  
Smelling of apple-orchards;  
Smelling of cherry-trees in full blossom;  
Smelling of all the pleasant recollections of my childhood —  
Smelling of Grandmother's kitchen,  
Grandmother's freshly-baked dainties,  
Grandmother's plum-pudding —  
Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
I see before me a lane running between two rows of straggling cottages —  
I cannot remember the name of the lane;  
I do not know whether it has any name at all;  
[13]

But I remember it was broad and unpaven and shaded with  
wide-branching chestnuts  
And enters the market-place  
Just a few houses after my Grandfather's —  
Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
I can see it ever now  
My Grandfather's house —  
On the lane, to the right, as you come from the market-  
place;  
A big, hospitable frame building —  
Big as my Grandfather's own heart,  
And hospitable as Grandmother's smile.  
I can see it even now,  
With the white-pillared porch in the center and the sharp-  
gabled roof  
Pierced with little windows;  
And the great quadrangular garden behind it;  
And the tall fence surrounding the garden;  
And the old well in the corner of the garden;  
With the bucket-lift  
Rising over the fence —  
Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
I can see him even now,  
My Grandfather —  
Bending over me, tall and sad-eyed and thoughtful —  
Lifting me up and seating me on his knees  
Lovingly,  
And listening to all my childish questions and confessions;  
Pardoning, admonishing, remonstrating —  
Satisfying my interrogative soul with good-humored indul-  
gence.  
And my Grandmother,  
Dear little woman!

I can never dissociate her from plum-pudding and apple-  
dumplings,  
And raisin-cakes and almond-cakes and crisp potato-pan-  
cakes  
And the smell of fish frying on the fire.  
And then there is my cousin, Miriam,  
Who lived in the yellow house across the lane —  
A freckle-faced, cherry-eyed little girl with a puckered-up  
nose —  
I was very romantic about her.  
And then there is my curse, my rival at school, my arch-  
enemy —  
Jacob,  
The synagogue sexton's boy,  
On whom I was always warring —  
God knows on what battlefield he must be lying now!  
And then there is Nathan and Joseph and Berel and Solo-  
mon  
And Ephraim, the baker's boy,  
And Baruch and Gershen and Mendel  
And long-legged, sandy-haired Emanuel who fell into the  
pond with me that time,  
While we were skating on the ice —  
Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
I can see myself even now  
In the lane on a summer's day,  
Cap in hand, chasing after dragon-flies —  
Suddenly, nearby, sounds the noise of drums and bugles —  
I know what that means!  
Breathlessly I dash up the lane.  
It is the regiment quartered in the barracks at the end of  
the town, in its annual parade on the highway —  
How I would wish to be one of those gray-coated heroes!

I watch them eager-eyed —  
And run after them until they reach the Gentile Quarter —  
And then I turn back.  
Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
I am in the market-place —  
At a Fair;  
The market-place is a heaving mass of carts and horses and  
    oxen;  
The oxen are lowing, the horses are neighing, the peasants  
    are cursing in a dozen different dialects.  
I am in Grandfather's store,  
On the lower end of the market-place, right opposite the  
    public well —  
The store is full of peasants and peasant women, bargaining  
    at the top of their voices;  
The peasants are clad in rough sheepskin coats and fur  
    caps;  
The peasant women are gay in bright-colored cottons and  
    wear red kerchiefs around their heads;  
My Grandfather is standing behind the counter measuring  
    out rope to some peasants;  
Grandmother is cutting a strip of linen for a peasant woman,  
    chaffering with another one at the same time about the  
    price of a pair of sandals —  
And I am sitting there, behind the counter, on a sack of  
    flour,  
Playing with my black-eyed little cousin. . . .

Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
Kartúshkiya-Beróza!  
It comes back to me suddenly —  
That I am sitting here, with a newspaper in my hand  
Reading:

*“The Germans have seized the bridge-head at Kartúshkiya-Beróza;  
The Russians are retreating in good order across the marshes.  
The town is in flames!”*

## A FAMILY ALBUM

### I

WORN and torn by many fingers  
It stands on the bed-room dresser,  
Resting back against its single cardboard buttress,  
(There were two)  
The gilt clasp that bound it, loose and broken,  
The beautiful Madonna on its cover, faded and pencil-  
marked,  
And the coarse wood of its back showing through its velvet  
lining.

### II

I remember the time that my sister Pauline bought it for  
the house  
(300 Cherry Street, fourth floor, right-hand side, front)  
Thirteen years ago,  
With the proceeds of her first week at the factory.  
It was beautiful then,  
The golden-haired, grave-eyed Madonna that adorned it.  
Her blue eyes were ever so much bluer and clearer, and so  
sweetly pensive,  
Her golden hair fell forward over her bare breast,  
Brighter and yellower than gold,  
And there were no black pencil marks across the pure white  
of her brow

Or the delicate pink of her cheeks.  
She was beautiful . . .  
And my father,  
I remember my father didn't like that album,  
And murmured against the open-bosomed female on its  
cover,  
"It is sinful to have such a picture in a Jewish home!"  
But I,  
I loved that album because of its glorious, golden-haired  
Madonna.  
And when I was left alone in the house  
I would stand in the parlor for hours  
And gaze into her ecstatic face  
Half reverently, half tenderly.  
And sometimes,  
When I was doubly certain of being alone,  
I would drag a chair up to the mantel-piece  
And get on top of it,  
And, timidly extending my hand,  
Touch with my trembling fingers the yellow threads of her  
hair as they lay across her breast,  
Or the soft slope of her breast into her loose robe.  
And once, I remember,  
Ashamed of my feelings, yet unable to repress them,  
I drew the picture closer to my face.  
And pressed my lips passionately on that white bosom —  
My first kiss. . . .

### III

Somehow I never cared to open the gilt clasp of the album  
And look through the photographs that were collecting  
there:  
Photographs brought here from Russia,

Photographs taken here at various times,  
Grandfathers, grandmothers, aunts, uncles, cousins,  
Sisters and sisters-in-law, brothers and brothers-in-law;  
Photographs of some of the many boarders that always oc-  
cupied our bedrooms;  
(The family usually slept on folding-beds in the kitchen and  
parlor  
Together with some other boarders)  
Boarders-in-law; sweethearts, wives, husbands of the board-  
ers;  
Group pictures: family pictures, shop pictures, school pic-  
tures.  
Somehow I never cared to open the gilt clasp of the album  
And look through that strange kaleidoscope of Life.  
But now,  
As I find myself turning its heavy cardboard pages,  
Turning them meditatively back and forth,  
My brain loosens like the gilt clasp of the album,  
Unburdening itself of its locked memories,  
Page after page, picture after picture,  
Until the miscellaneous photographs take to themselves  
color and meaning,  
Standing forth out of their places like a series of paintings;  
As if a Master-Artist had gone over them with his brush,  
Revealing in them things I did not see in the originals,  
Solving in Art that which baffled me in Life.  
And all the while as I go through the album, supporting  
the cover with my hand,  
The yellow-haired Madonna gazes at me from under my  
fingers,  
Sadly, reproachfully.

#### IV

Poor, warm-hearted, soft-headed, hard-fisted Uncle Isaac  
 In his jaunty coat and flannel shirt,  
 Stiff and handsome and moustached,  
 Standing as if he were in evening dress —  
 His head thrown backward, his eyes fixed forward;  
 Conscious of the cleanliness of his face and hands,  
 Fresh washed from a day's grime at the coal cellar.  
 When I look at his bold, blank face  
 My mind tears through the dense years,  
 Along the crazy alley of his life,  
 Back to a Lithuanian village on a twig of the Vistula.  
 Kartúshkiya-Beróza (what a sweet name —  
 Beróza is the Russian for birch-trees)  
 And from a background of a dusty road meandering be-  
     tween high, green banks of foliage  
 I feel two black eyes looking at me strangely,  
 Two black passion-pregnant eyes  
 Nestling in a little dark face.

#### V

Every Saturday afternoon in the summertime  
 When the town was like a green bazaar  
 With the houses half-hidden under leaves and the lanes  
     drifting blindly between the dense shade-trees  
 After the many-coursed Sabbath dinner and the long syn-  
     agogue services that preceded it  
 Mother took the four of us over to Grandpa's  
 A few houses up the lane  
 Where the aunts and the uncles and the cousins and the  
     nephews and the nieces  
 In silk and in flannel and in satin and in linen,  
 Every face shining with a Sabbath newness,

Gathered on the porch for the family promenade:  
Up the lane and across the Gentile quarter and around the  
Bishop's orchard;  
Through the Polish Road past the Tombs of the Rebels to  
the haunted red chapel at the crossroads —  
And back again by cross cuts through the cornfields,  
With the level yellow plain mellowing mystically around us  
in the soft sunshine,  
And the sunset fading behind us like the Sabbath,  
At twilight — just before the evening service —  
Every Saturday afternoon, in summertime.

## VI

They rise in my brain with mysterious insistence  
The blurred images of those Sabbath walks —  
Poignantly, painfully, vaguely beautiful,  
Half obliterated under the cavalcade of the years,  
They lurk in the wayside of my mind and ambush me un-  
awares —  
Like little children they steal behind me unawares and  
blindfold me with intangible fingers  
Asking me to guess who it is:  
Across a wide city street a patch of pavement like a slab  
of gold;  
A flash of sunlight on a flying wheel —  
And I am left wondering, wondering where I have seen  
sunlight before?  
By a holiday-thronged park walk, a trio of huge trees thrust  
their great, brown arms through uplifted hillocks of  
green leaves —  
And I stand staring at them penetratively;  
Trying to assure myself that they were real,  
And not something that had swum up in my mind

From a summer that has withered years ago —  
In the beaches by the wayside on the Polish Road,  
Isled among the birch woods,  
As you come out of Kartúshkiya-Beróza.  
On my bed, within the padded prison-walls of sleep, lurch-  
ing through a night of dreams;  
I am awakened by a shrill wide-spreading triumphant out-  
burst of incessant twittering —  
Under my window in the park,  
Catching like fire from tree to tree, from throat to throat  
Until the whole green square seems ablaze with joy,  
As if each growing leaf had suddenly found tongue —  
And I raise myself in my bed, dreamily, on my elbows  
Listening with startled attentiveness to a sweet, clear twitter-  
ing in my brain  
As of a hundred populous treetops vying with the pebble-  
tuned waters of a brook  
Gurgling timidly across a wide road.  
In a hallway among a party of girls and young men trip-  
ping downstairs for an outing on a Sunday morn-  
ing,  
The coarse, keen pungency of satin from some girl's new  
shirtwaist,  
Through my nose into my brain pierces like a rapier —  
And suddenly I am standing on a sunny country porch with  
whitewashed wooden columns,  
All dressed up for a Sabbath walk,  
In a red satin blouse with a lacquered, black belt  
With my mother in her blue silk Sabbath dress and grand-  
mother with a black lace shawl around her head  
With my sisters and my brother and portly Uncle Zalman  
with his fat, red-bearded face  
And my grandfather stooping in his shining black capote

with his grizzled beard and earlocks and thoughtful,  
tiny eyes  
And poor Aunt Bunya who died of her first childbirth, with  
her roguish-eyed young husband  
And smooth-shaven, moustached Uncle Isaac half-leaning,  
half-sitting on the bannister with his little girl clamped  
playfully between his knees  
And his wife Rebecca, with black eyes and pursed up scorn-  
ful lips standing haughtily aloof  
And my cousins Basha and Miriam and little Nachman  
clutching at Uncle Zalman's trousers  
And their mother, smiling, big-hearted, big-bosomed Aunt  
Golda, offering me a piece of tart  
As I am staring absently sideways  
Into the little dark face rimmed lovingly between Uncle  
Isaac's coarse hands.

## MA

WHAT can she be thinking of —  
This gray-haired, dark-faced little woman  
With those close-drawn cheeks and humbly lowered eyes,  
As she bends over the washtub,  
Scrubbing the wet underwear against the wash-board  
All morning long!  
What can she be thinking of —  
In this queerly quiet kitchen,  
Dark and small and clean-kept like herself,  
As the blown rain whips against the window pane  
And swishes into the yard  
With a soft, continual splash.  
I have an impelling desire to understand her;  
To know her and get nearer to her —  
This tired-faced woman who is my mother.  
I wish I could get into her bowed head  
As she bends over the washtub,  
And look through her dimmed eyes  
And see how things seem to her  
After fifty-seven years of life —  
Fifty-seven years of the great commonplaces of life:  
Childhood, girlhood, wifehood, motherhood;  
All but death —  
And that too.  
Fifty-seven years of sorrowing, rejoicing, despairing,

Over the world's timeless joys and griefs;  
Questioning not the scheme  
That mostly gave her things to sorrow over,  
And despair over  
All these years.  
After bringing ten children into the world,  
In the ordinary, miraculous way;  
Nursing them with unwearied breasts,  
Working for them with unwearied hands,  
Loving them with unwearied patience,  
Battling for them  
With poverty, death and disease  
For thirty years; —  
Seeing some of them struggle into manhood;  
Seeing some of them struggle into womanhood,  
Painfully, joylessly;  
And following some of them to their little graves,  
In their birthplace across the sea,  
Under the Russian birch trees.  
And one —  
She who was your first born, mother!  
She who gave you most joy and most pain —  
Seeing her grow up in your barren house,  
Like a tall tree from a cleft rock,  
Strong and healthy and haughty with beauty,  
Hating her humble birth,  
Panting for color and joy; —  
Seeing her flare out her tumultuous years,  
In a brief feverish fire;  
Until you followed her too,  
Burying half of your heart,  
Under a tombstone in Brooklyn.  
And all the while,

These thirty-seven years,  
Mated with the wreck of a strong man,  
The wreck of a great soul,  
Broken and humbled by a strange disease,  
That lurked in him like an assassin —  
Patiently loving, living, bearing with him;  
Suffering his pain as your own;  
Sharing his weakness and worshipping his strength;  
Respecting the tragedy you could not understand.  
Woman, woman,  
Sublime, simple mother of mine,  
Scrubbing away at the washboard  
With gnarled, mechanical fingers —  
What do you make of all this!  
How do you reconcile,  
All the purposelessness and fruitlessness and contrariness  
of things  
In that crude mind of yours —  
Seeing the faith that cloaked you from the truth,  
That explained and arranged and combined,  
Systematizing the universe into a well-ordered household  
With a Master who saw all and knew all;  
Punishing and rewarding in inexplicable ways —  
Seeing your old faith cast off and trampled under foot,  
Ignored and derided by your own children  
As a foolish, baseless fable.  
Mother, poor mother of mine,  
What can you make of all this,  
Scrubbing away at your washboard,  
This rainy morning!  
What are you thinking about?  
I wish I could know;  
Are you thinking of her that you lost,

In the full-blown bloom of your hope —  
Plucked from your arms,  
As you held her down to the bed  
Helping the doctor that day;  
Do you see her come in through the door,  
Quick and abrupt as of old:  
Her heavy, masculine step;  
Her straight and broad-bosomed figure;  
The animal health of her cheeks.  
Are you remembering,  
Some word that she carelessly dropped;  
A certain twist of her neck?  
And your dark face darkens;  
And your gray head pensively droops;  
And your eyes that have wept themselves red,  
Glistening with oncoming tears.  
Or are you thinking of your husband,  
Reeling his way through the years,  
Stupefied by his fate —  
Falling and rising and falling,  
Under the bludgeon of life!  
And you remember a Sabbath afternoon  
In Kartúshkiya-Beróza,  
When the town turned out for a stroll; —  
How you walked by his side on the highway,  
Proud to be envied of all.  
Or are you thinking of me —  
Your strange, queer, puzzle of a son;  
The poet-changeling of your womb —  
Whom you would love but do not know how;  
Whom you would hope for but do not know what.  
And your heart is sad with apprehension  
Knowing not why.

Or are you thinking of the little ones  
And your little daily cares:  
Those socks that you washed just now —  
They are far too torn to be mended;  
Or those worn out shreds of underwear  
And winter coming. . . .

Here they are back from school  
With a loud ring at the door —  
“ I’ll open it, Ma.”

## PORTRAIT

THIS is her picture hanging on the wall,  
Above the mantelpiece.  
The face is grave  
And wistful —  
Not like the life —  
The eyes are much too moody,  
The nose too thin,  
The lips too firmly set —  
Too pale;  
Also the chin and cheeks  
Too sharply curved,  
Not full enough,  
The general impression rather tame.  
Always,  
When I could see her,  
She made me think of some sleek leopardess  
Pacing the desert —  
Her beauty was so fiercely-fair.  
Peculiar though,  
She did look somewhat changed —  
Wistful and awed,  
Just like this picture —  
The day she died!

## IN THE CIRCULATING LIBRARY: SEWARD PARK

### OUTSIDE

It is hot and arid;  
And the sun glares down upon the tall tenements;  
And the tall tenements glare back into the park;  
And the little park lies gasping between them,  
Thrusting its parched trees pitifully to the sky —  
Inside,  
In the oak arm-chairs by the windows,  
It is almost cool;  
And the drawn green blinds beat back the insistent sun-light  
Like long shields;  
And the rotating fans sting the air into motion  
Like gigantic bees;  
And the stacked books stand loosely in their shelves  
Leaning lazily against each other —  
It is almost cool here in the library,  
Cool and absorbingly quiet,  
With the intense quiet of a thousand dreams  
That oozes out of the books.

A red-haired librarian with starched white cuffs,  
Sits at a table marking colored cards,  
Red and white and green  
With a purple pencil.

I follow her fingers as she writes  
Until I am half hypnotized into sleep.

Strange, strange,  
How familiar all this is and yet how strange —  
The walls and the pictures and the books and the self-  
absorbed faces about me —  
Strange! strange!

There is a boy sitting beside me at the window;  
His back bent, his head lowered,  
Peering at the book in his hands,  
Through rusty, iron-rimmed spectacles —  
His ears are outspread and huge;  
His little eyes sparkle feverishly behind his thick lenses;  
And his brow is knitted intently.

There is a girl standing near by,  
With black curly hair and thick drooping lips,  
Leaning heavily against the tall shelf as she reads —  
Her eyes are gray and restless,  
And her lips are passionately a-quiver.

There is a young man standing beside her —  
Tall and lanky and long-haired;  
Casually scanning the book in his hands;  
Looking up from it from time to time,  
As if waiting for someone.

What a flood of memories —  
My brain is dizzy with them!

A dark girl,  
Ill-featured and pimply,

Sits at the table opposite the red-haired librarian;  
Her long nose strains upward out of her face;  
Her shell-rimmed spectacles rest back against her cheeks  
    like cart-wheels;  
But her eyes shine from under them,  
Kindly and sweet,  
Like sun-warmed pools.

Strange, strange,  
How familiar all this is and yet how strange!

There is a boy and girl talking there together,  
Beside that window,  
By the gray, dormant radiator —  
Half-drawn to her, half afraid of her,  
He fidgets nervously with his books,  
Looking aside as he speaks to her,  
In long jerky sentences —  
And her eyes are dark and soft;  
And her lips are pale and sweet;  
And her chin so prettily pointed. . . .

Ghosts! ghosts!  
Ghosts of my old selves and my old loves and my old  
    dreams —  
How I know you all. . . .

Boy there,  
With the Slavic face and the Jewish soul;  
With the stubborn nose and the sensitive mouth —  
What are you reading?  
Keats or Shelley or Swinburne or Browning —  
Which is it now?

Girl,  
With the passionate lips and the restless eyes —  
Are you reading “The Diary of Marie Bashkirtseff ”?  
And does your heart ache; and does your soul smart  
With pride, ambition and love —  
Or are you building here another Lesbos,  
For another Sappho?  
And you,  
With the homely face and the strong sweet smile —  
What are you reading,  
George Eliot or Emily Brontë?  
Or are you dreaming of Georges Sand?  
And your heart is secretly pleased,  
At the thought of the genius and fame,  
That will bring great men to your feet!  
And you, poor youth,  
Searching the room with those patient eyes —  
I know for whom you are here.  
She isn't here . . . it is late . . .  
Someone who never will come. . . .  
Perhaps it is best!

Boy-lover there by the window,  
Are you afraid to look at her face,  
Lest your eyes be tempted to speak?  
And yet —  
Is it not sweet to be near her;  
To talk to her; to look at her sidewise;  
To blush; to stammer unconcernedly,  
Art, Economics, Philosophy,  
While your lips are a-quiver with love!

*Ghosts! ghosts!*  
*Ghosts of my old selves, and my old loves and my old*  
*dreams,*  
*Crowding in through my eyes and my ears,*  
*Until my mind is a haunted house,*  
*Running over with ghosts —*  
*Until I feel myself like a ghost,*  
*Haunting this home of my thoughts.*

## LAMENTATIONS

IN a dingy kitchen  
Facing a Ghetto backyard  
An old woman is chanting Jeremiah's Lamentations,  
Quaveringly,  
Out of a Hebrew Bible.

The gaslight flares and falls. . . .

This night,  
Two thousand years ago,  
Jerusalem fell and the Temple was burned.  
Tonight  
This white-haired Jewess  
Sits in her kitchen and chants — by the banks of the Hud-  
son —  
The Lament of the Prophet.

The gaslight flares and falls. . . .

Nearby,  
Locked in her room,  
Her daughter lies on a bed convulsively sobbing.  
Her face is dug in the pillows;  
Her shoulders heave with her sobs —  
The bits of a photograph lie on the dresser. . . .

## TIMES SQUARE

AN August day,  
The eddying roar of the Square —  
Crowds, stores, theatres, tall buildings  
Assaulting the senses together —  
And suddenly,  
The taste of an apple between my teeth  
Suffuses my mouth. . . .  
Where did it come from? —  
Strong and sharp and deliciously sour,  
The taste in my mouth —  
Where?

I cross the street  
And suddenly,  
Crowds, stores, theatres, tall buildings,  
The blare and the glare of the day  
Fade. . . .  
October blows through the market-place  
In a town of faraway Russia —  
The booths are laden with fruit. . . .  
A little boy,  
Snub-nosed, freckle-faced, plump,  
Dressed in a newly-washed jacket,  
Stolidly strolls by the booths  
Clutching a coin in his fingers —

I know him,  
That freckle-faced boy;  
I know him.  
Proudly he passes the stores of the Row,  
Ignoring them all —  
Until he reaches at last  
The booth of the widow Rebecca:  
“What do you want, little darling?”  
“Here is a penny;  
I want this apple.”  
“Take it.”  
The tense little fingers uncloseto surrender the penny  
And close on a big red apple.  
And suddenly,  
The taste of an apple between my teeth,  
Strong and sharp and deliciously sour,  
Suffuses my mouth. . . .

The toot of an automobile,  
Insistent, shrill,  
Jars me back to the Square.

## GHETTO TWILIGHT

AN infinite weariness comes into the faces of the old tene-  
ments,  
As they stand massed together on the block,  
Tall and thoughtfully silent,  
In the enveloping twilight.  
Pensively,  
They eye each other across the street,  
Through their dim windows —  
With a sad recognizing stare,  
Watching the red glow fading in the distance,  
At the end of the street,  
Behind the black church spires;  
Watching the vague sky lowering overhead,  
Purple with clouds of colored smoke  
From the extinguished sunset;  
Watching the tired faces coming home from work,  
Like dry-breasted hags  
Welcoming their children to their withered arms.

## IN THE CHILDREN'S READING ROOM

LITTLE girl,  
Dreaming here in the library  
Over a volume of romance,  
Who can he be —  
The Hero of your dreams!

Is he a Knight of old days,  
Stout-hearted and strong,  
Astride on a steed,  
Breast-plated, helmetted, shield-on-arm, lance-in-hand  
Charging the world in your name!  
Or else —  
Does he kneel at your feet even now,  
A Boy-Prince,  
Blue-eyed, curly-locked,  
With ruddy cheeks  
And lips as sweet as your own —  
Asking the realm of your heart? ·  
Or else,  
Who knows?  
A King perhaps —  
Stern-eyed, royal-browed;  
With crown and sceptre and ermine,  
Sitting in state by your side! . . .  
Or are you tired of unreal reveries,

And mould him in a modern form —  
A statesman  
With a tongue that wakes a million hearts;  
With a pen that guides a million swords —  
Leading his country to greatness!  
Or an Inventor —  
Larger-souled,  
Working not only for a single selfish nation,  
But for the greater Nation of humanity —  
Liberating Labor from toil.  
Or else —  
(Those eyes are strangely, dimly deep)  
A Poet perhaps,  
Divine in his love;  
Pouring his soul into mad, magnificent poems —  
Eternal as time!  
Or a Musician  
A-thrill with melodies,  
Whose passion shall mount into marvels of sound,  
And storm your heart — and the world's!  
Or a Painter  
Who will glorify that brow  
And those eyes  
And those lips,  
For all the world to behold!  
Or a Sculptor  
With creative, God-like fingers  
Moulding flesh out of clay,  
Carving beauty out of the struggling marble. . . .  
Or else —  
Who knows?  
Is he sitting here —  
Even here in the library,

Across the table —  
That little pale-faced boy!

Little boy  
With that far-away look of yours —  
Sitting here in the library  
Over a volume of romance —  
Who can she be  
The Lady of your dreams? . . .

## JEAN

GRAY-EYED  
Freckle-faced  
Jean —  
Snub-nosed  
Chubby-cheeked  
Golden-haired  
Jean,  
Little Jean  
With her big gray eyes,  
Spoke to me to-day:  
“Aren’t you queer!  
Why do you look  
Into my eyes  
So —  
What do you see in my eyes? ”  
Said I:  
“Little Jean,  
Aren’t you queer!  
Why do you look  
Into my soul  
So —  
What do you see in my soul? ”

## AN OLD PICTURE

FADED and rumpled,  
Under a cracked glass cover  
In a dirty gilt frame —  
It hangs on the kitchen wall  
Right over the stove.

A music room;  
Twilight;  
A young woman sits at a piano playing;  
Three little girls behind her,  
Accompanying with their voices —  
One of them gravely directing.  
(The picture is entitled "The Trio.")  
The window of the room opens on a landscape of trees —  
A wood or a park.

Once it hung in the parlor,  
With a companion piece —  
A Spanish girl in a monastery  
Confessing to a young priest.  
That one was burnt in the stove,  
Long since,  
After being shattered by a fall.  
Now "The Trio" hangs alone.

I remember when I was a child,  
And we lived on the fourth floor of a Cherry Street tene-  
ment —  
I used to get on top of a chair,  
A parlor chair, too —  
And look through the window of the picture,  
Far out,  
On the melancholy masses of trees  
Waving under the twilight sky,  
(I didn't like little girls then —  
Nor big ones)  
Something stirred me as I looked at those trees  
And pervaded my spirit. . . .  
When mother dusted in the parlor  
She always wondered why that chair was so dirty.  
Then when I became a long lanky boy,  
And didn't have to get on top of a chair —  
I was fascinated by the dark-haired little director.  
I was reading the Waverly Novels then.  
How many day-dreams did I build about her —  
Clothed her (and myself)  
In all the enchantment I could conjure:  
Fought duels for her;  
Jousted for her —  
What not!  
Now I find myself looking at it again,  
(It hangs on the kitchen wall  
Right over the stove)  
Wonderingly,  
Trying to understand it.  
Who is she;  
That young woman sitting at the piano,  
Playing so sadly —

I swear she is playing some sad ditty!  
Are those three cherub-children hers,  
Or just that dark-haired little director —  
Or is she a music teacher perhaps,  
And those are her pupils. . . .  
She has an interesting face,  
And beautiful hands —  
I wonder why she is watching her fingers so pensively!

## ON THE STREET-CAR

WE were alone in the car —

I and her soft, black eyes,

Looking blandly at me from the opposite seat.

The car raced along the tracks, through the wide street,

Past forbidding porches and lit store-windows and dark  
cross-streets,

Stopping at some of the corners with a jar.

The rain pattered invisibly on the dewed windows of the car,

Denting them with a thousand tiny drops.

The lamplights quivered past us on their posts

Shimmering through the windows on either side,

Blurred and rayed.

We were alone in the car —

I and her soft black eyes

Wearily vacant,

Soothing me with their vacancy.

I found myself staring into her mild face,

Wistfully,

Seeking for something.

Her lips caressed me with their calm curves;

My eyes cooled themselves on her pale forehead.

Like a long needle

The electric bulb over her seat pierced into my eye-balls —

I lowered my eyes,

Resting them on the green folds of her skirt.

Her hands lay loosely on her lap.  
I found myself staring at them,  
Envyng them with a strange envy.  
Something choked downward in my throat —  
Fell heavily upon my heart and lay there,  
Like some corrosive substance.  
My head tipped forward weakly,  
A wild wish surged giddily through my brain,  
Pulling me and pushing me to speak —  
She is a woman;  
She will understand. . . .  
If I could only sit down beside her,  
And hide my face where her hands are lying,  
And tell her all, all! . . .  
And cry for once —  
Cry out all the bitterness of my life,  
Cry for all the times that I didn't cry,  
Because there was no woman's lap to hide myself in,  
No woman's face to bend tenderly over me,  
No woman's voice to soothe me softly. . . .  
To cry. . . .

The car stopped at the corner with a reverberating jar.  
She arranged the green folds of her dress,  
Walked up quietly to the platform,  
And stepped off into the night.

## FROM THE THIRD STORY WINDOW

THIS is our backyard;  
Walls and windows and clothes lines  
Wherever you look —  
See  
How the sunlight slants across the topmost bricks,  
On the opposite wall  
Like a golden triangle;  
We don't get much of it here,  
So we can appreciate it.  
You'd be surprised  
How beautiful this place can look,  
At night —  
With those tiers of windows rising on all sides,  
Dark and secretive,  
Looking at each other queerly —  
As if they knew what was taking place behind the blinds,  
But chose to be silent.  
When I come home late,  
And go searching for my supper on the fire-escape,  
(My mother leaves it there)  
I like to sit there a while  
And look out into the yard.  
Sometimes there is a moon  
And some stars,  
In that square piece of heaven

That the walls cut out.  
It's a little piece to have,  
But a good enough sample to see —  
People are spoiled  
Getting the whole sky to look at  
Every time they choose.  
Mondays,  
The clothes lines are freighted with wash,  
Bridging the yard in long white files.  
It's a good night to see it.  
The moon can look wonderful through a white bed sheet.  
It lights up the clothes lines,  
Until each piece of wash seems to clothe a ghost.  
Sometimes a wind clambers into the yard  
And goes blundering among the wash,  
Blowing them into billowy folds,  
Twisting them together clumsily.  
Even in the daytime,  
It's not at all a bad place to look at.  
It's true,  
We don't see much of sunset here  
Or sunrise —  
But you can watch that wedge of light  
On the top of that wall,  
A silver spike in the morning —  
Lengthening and broadening and lowering,  
Until it reaches the fourth story windows.  
(That's the lowest it can go)  
And then,  
Mellowing into pale gold,  
Softer and shorter and higher,  
Until it climbs back into the sky  
At twilight —

Then the yard is steeped in such melancholy ;  
Such an absorbing singing sadness ;  
It makes you think of a fond woman  
Bidding a last good-bye to her lover.  
It's so infecting.  
It oozes into the windows ;  
It fills every room —  
Until the walls and the beds and the tables and chairs,  
Just swim in it.  
Even the prosaic washtub becomes pensive,  
In spite of itself ;  
You can't escape it. . . .  
Of course,  
If you want to think of it,  
It's a foul place to have your windows open on —  
Full of dust and refuse and vermin.  
And the air you breathe isn't changed very often,  
In this four-walled air tank.  
But what of that : —  
Poems are not made to live in.

## A BED-ROOM INTERIOR

OUT of a half-curtained window  
The bed-room peers into the yard,  
Three stories below.  
The twilight filters through the window  
Touching the walls and ceiling and woodwork  
(All white)  
With moody shadows.  
A bed stands against the window —  
Stolidly  
It rests upon its iron posts,  
Lifting its broad brass head  
Over pillows and beddings,  
A ghastly white.  
The other side of the doorway,  
Facing the head of the bed,  
A tall, panelled closet.  
The doors are slightly ajar;  
The hem of a petticoat peeps between them.  
In the opposite corner,  
Cross-wise,  
Facing the foot of the bed,  
A dresser,  
(White as the hem of the petticoat)  
Mounting a big, round mirror  
In two curved arms.

On top:

Brush, combs, hair-pins;

Boxes of powder and cold cream;

An ivory-framed photograph; —

(The portrait of a young man),

Bronze statuettes.

The mirror of the dresser is covered with a white cloth.

From the opposite wall

The portrait of a young woman gazes into its covered face.

The heavy gilt frame is draped in black crêpe. . . .

## A FUNERAL: ITALIAN QUARTER

SOMEONE is dead. . . .  
Like an intermittent wail,  
The music rises at each corner,  
As the band blares out the strain —  
Poignantly rises and falls,  
Like a sharp-crested wave  
Breaking wearily against the stone tenements;  
Like the sigh of an invisible sword  
Cleaving through the air,  
Up and down —  
Someone is dead. . . .  
Like a row of black beetles  
The coaches crawl after the bedecked hearse,  
Through the narrow gully of the street, banked by brood-  
ing tenements,  
Slowly, monotonously filing  
Into the boisterous breadth of the Avenue, under the harsh-  
rumbling Elevated —  
The coachmen crack their whips and the horses strain for-  
ward;  
And the music strikes a shriller, wilder key,  
Struggling desperately to assert itself in the multi-mouthed  
tumult —  
Someone is dead. . . .  
In the garland-decked hearse he is lying —

In the garland-decked hearse, within the carved casket,  
Reposing royally.  
Yesterday he was a hewer of wood and a carrier of coal,  
Bending under his endless burdens on the endless stairs —  
Now he is riding in a garland-decked hearse, within a carved  
casket,  
In fine linen — bathed and washed at last —  
Guarded by four angels in livery!

## CROSS-STREETS

I LOVE to watch them as I pass by them on the street-car —  
Rambling away from the Avenue between blocks of tall  
    tenements  
That brood over them from both sides,  
Like old market women;  
Or stealing mysteriously through long low brown-stone  
    blocks at night,  
Between trees and porches and lamplights —  
Lonely lamplights retreating behind each other on their  
    posts,  
Mingling with the stars where the dark street meets the dark  
    sky;  
Or lying resignedly at the bottom of gloomy office-buildings,  
Or stately apartment-palaces —  
At twilight,  
With the last remnants of sunset for a background,  
Fading moodily in the sky;  
Or at noon,  
Spreading lazily between sun-steeped mansions,  
Long and wide and warm and bright  
Under hot, blue, cloudless skies;  
Or at early dawn;  
Waking from sleep,  
With the red face of sunrise,  
Glowing behind the green foliage of a park  
Where the street ends!

## A CITY PARK

### I

TIMIDLY

Against a background of brick tenements  
Some trees spread their branches  
Skyward.  
They are thin and sapless,  
They are bent and weary —  
Tamed with captivity;  
And they huddle behind the fence  
Swaying helplessly before the wind,  
Forward and backward,  
Like a group of panicky deer  
Caught in a cage.

### II

#### AT NIGHT

I wonder what they are whispering about,  
These lean old trees  
With their bent heads  
Swaying in the night-wind —  
What treacheries are they planning together,  
Nudging each other in the dark  
With gnarled fingers;  
Scowling at the sleeping tenements  
From under their great brows  
So ominously.

## BEFORE THE STORM

LIKE a petulant child  
The wind railed in the tree tops,  
Tearing aimlessly through the foliage  
Pulling plaintively at the twigs,  
Shaking the branches,  
Fretfully.

Like mothers,  
Fondly-indulgent,  
The old trees bent their heads  
Chidingly, soothingly.

## A SUNLIT STREET

THE City lay back in the sunshine  
And quivered with pleasure,  
Like a woman in the arms of her lover.  
Tenderly  
The warm, white sunlight kissed her cheeks,  
And wound itself about her body,  
And clung to her,  
Passionately.

In the middle of the street  
A dead dog lay,  
With blood-shot envious eyes,  
A-stare at the sun.

## A SUNLIT ROOM

FROM the hot blinded street  
The sunshine overflows  
Into the whole room.  
The curtains hang stiff and taut  
As the yellow light sifts through their white lacework  
Turning them into gold;  
The window-panes sparkle with delight —  
Golden are the ivory keys of the piano as the sunshine plays  
    upon them  
And its dark mahogany body is a bright red.  
Opposite  
The chairs stand close against the illumined wall  
And sun themselves;  
The peacocks spread their tails within the two black panels  
And stretch themselves in the sun.  
On the marble mantelpiece, over the mock fireplace,  
A canary trills in a cage —  
In a golden cage burnished with sunshine,  
Trills and twitters and hops in the light  
As her throat bubbles over with joy.

## BY THE WINDOW

(FOR H. R.)

That photograph is not you —  
Nor this one;  
That profile does not bring into play  
The massive oval of your face  
Full and firm and long —  
Too bad  
Cameras cannot reproduce souls  
As well as bodies;  
But that's the trouble:  
Bodies can be reproduced but souls must be interpreted  
By poets, painters, actresses,  
Like you and me —  
That's Art!  
I wish I were a painter though;  
I would paint you right now,  
As you sit there facing me,  
In the broad yellow arm chair by the window —  
Right now,  
With the sunlight streaming eagerly through the panes  
Kissing the bent curve of your neck;  
Striving to warm the black masses of your hair into gold;  
Putting forth passionate arms about the cool green folds of  
your dress,

As if to embrace you —  
With the whole Park lying behind you for a background  
Ten stories below —  
The Park with its trees and the vast circumference of the  
    Reservoir in the center,  
Sparkling in the sun,  
Like a round blue shield of steel;  
And afar,  
The length of the City stretching on the other side of the  
    Park —  
A long straight line of mansions zig-zagged into the clear  
    sky  
So sharply — so minutely visible,  
One would think it to be an architect's model  
Or a toy-city made out of blocks.  
That would be a background for you  
After Zuloaga's own heart —  
Only I doubt if Zuloaga could have painted that smile:  
Vast, omniscient, contemplative,       .  
Yet bright and wholesome as the sunshine  
And sweetly playful,  
That floods me from your calm face,  
Zuloaga's portraits do not smile that way.  
Somebody else would have to do it  
And soften into depth  
The firmness of that mouth and the fixity of those eyes —  
Even as Spring softens the outlines of these trees below.  
Otherwise you would be merely beautiful;  
A "Greek Goddess" as the dramatic critic calls you —  
I don't agree with him — at least I don't want to,  
Being a Jew.  
I prefer Christ to Plato any time;  
Mary Magdalene rather than Helen —

Even Salome.  
I always think of Greece as being soulless:  
A beautiful youth playing in the sun,  
Carelessly happy,  
Taking and giving love lightly —  
So I would prefer to see you as a Jewess,  
Pale,  
Chastened with sorrow as the Magdalene;  
Or primevally, orientally passionate as Salome —  
“ Give me the head of Jokahnaan! ”  
I surely would have given it to you if I were Herod,  
And thought it well worth the price  
To see the Dance of the Seven Veils danced by you.  
I would rather see you as a Magdalene though —  
You are far too tall for Salome;  
Too royal looking to play the part of a wild-cat or a tigress.  
Magdalene would suit you much better:  
A big-souled, big-bodied woman who has sinned greatly  
And suffered greatly,  
And capable of great repentance.  
I can see you as the Magdalene  
Washing the feet of Jesus —  
On your knees;  
Your eyes lowered but without shame —  
Washing them with those large soft hands,  
And drying them with the thick black coils of your hair;  
And I can see Jesus looking down upon you  
Filled with a greater awe than yours,  
Worshipping you as you are worshipping Him!  
The Magdalene would suit you much better I think;  
Have you ever played it —  
I wonder!

## THE HILL-PATH

(FOR E. R.)

TRUE,

We could walk up the hills —

One can see ever so much more from there I suppose.

The Bay must look lovely now,

With a thousand little waves lapping this yellow light,  
As the grass here on the hillside.

I love afternoon sunlight

Striking grass or water or windowed city-streets

Such a soft, pale, melancholy gold.

Only isn't it much easier walking here?

Sometimes I am almost satisfied with looking at hills,

Instead of climbing them to look down

As one should.

Hills are so uncertain;

Always beautiful to look up to but not always beautiful to  
look down from —

There are so many things one can see from them —

This City, for instance,

On the other side of the Bay,

With its factories and tenements

Skulking back of the piled-up pinnacles on the waterfront;

Here,

You can look up to them,

But not through them —

I am afraid I am getting symbolical;  
I feel that way,  
Walking in Staten Island beside you,  
Who wants to go up the hills —  
These low-browed docile hills —  
You!  
Who have climbed the mountains,  
With Ibsen, Strindberg, Hauptmann,  
And all the Titan thinkers of your age.—  
And looked down with them,  
Into the dizzy abysses of life —  
Yourself a mountain-peak of Art!  
Yes,  
When I look at your big form,  
Broad-shouldered and generously rounded,  
With the wide jaws narrowing to a sparsely-covered head;  
And those eyes,  
Firm and keen and greyish,  
Nestling back of that eagle nose  
Like eaglets —  
Eyes that have looked on so much from their perch!  
I think you are yourself a mountain  
Of piled-up hopes, dreams, triumphs of the past,  
That one must scale to understand.  
It's easier though to look up than to climb up,  
And it may not be beautiful from the top  
Looking down —  
Still . . .  
I'll climb with you  
And take my chance on the view.  
Whatever it may be upon the surface,  
If one but looks deep enough into truth,  
It is always beautiful.

That's Realism I take it —  
You ought to know,  
Being Arch-Realist of your age.  
(I love your phrase:  
"Realism is but a broom,  
Clearing the stage for a deeper Romanticism.")  
So let's go up the hills,  
Where one can see far and clear and deep,  
Tower and tenement and ocean and river and bay,  
And Liberty lifting her torch from the Bay  
To light up the sky for our eyes.  
It's getting darker —  
Soon she will be lit up,  
And rise from the water, resplendently tall,  
A statue of silver and gold.  
I like her much better now  
With that lonely star  
Glittering there by her wrist —  
Be careful where you walk —  
Look at that muddy pool,  
With its deep-sunken filmy eye,  
Staring out of the side of the hill,  
As if someone lay drowned there.  
The trees step back from it  
Avoiding it as they climb the hill —  
It's peculiar,  
How the trees seem to climb with you laboriously  
When you ascend a wooded slope,  
And step down with you,  
Slowly and carefully,  
As if they feared to lose their footing.  
Here we are at the top  
At last!

## SOLILOQUY OF A REALIST

QUEER —

How that picture bothers me!  
I can't get it out of my mind:  
That tall-columned portico by the blue Aegean,  
With the sea framed between the two columns,  
And the young witch bending there over the glass hemi-  
sphere on the tripod,  
Watching the reflection of a sail  
On the horizon's edge.  
"Circe's Palace" it's called;  
I think she has bewitched me too —  
Not she so much as that portico of hers,  
With its mysteriously-majestic Ionic pillars,  
Like marble oak trunks rising.  
Every time I think of them my mind slips loose,  
And sails off into a sea of vague desires  
For beautiful unreal things.  
Pictures form in my mind  
Of such fantastic loveliness:  
Secluded oak groves where the wind whispers fearful ora-  
cles through the trees —  
While black-robed priests dance together in the moonlight  
And gash themselves with flashing knives;  
Dark lakes a-shimmer with the limbs of bathing goddesses;  
Vast deserted palaces

With labyrinthine corridors and long silent halls  
Where footsteps echo forever;  
Cities built to music,  
Whose streets are susurras of song —  
It's so tempting to let yourself go  
And just drift away from reality —  
Far away;  
From tenements and fire-escapes and backyards;  
From squalor and poverty and pettiness —  
Only it's such a hard job coming back!  
The more I think of marble palaces the less I like to look  
at these tenements;  
The more I wander through moonlit oak groves the less I  
like to pick my way through these pushcarts;  
And those creatures there —  
Swarming busily in and out of this filth,  
Satisfied to live and to breed,  
Like fleas on a carcass —  
I hate to think I am one of them.  
Ah!  
How different those great white symbolic-looking columns  
are —  
Speaking and singing of beauty and mystery and Greece!  
Of days and years and lives of perfect joy,  
Lived like poems in rhythm.  
But then;  
Aren't there different kinds of poetry?  
The kind that I have been preaching to myself all these  
years —  
Where does that come in:  
"The Beauty of the Commonplace"; "The Miracle of the  
Everyday"; "The Universality of Art"?  
Are these just phrases?

I am ashamed of myself —  
I, I who have taken Art to myself for lawful wife;  
I who have known her body and soul  
In the common intimacies of wedlock —  
To be talking like a silly lover,  
Serenading the lady of the moon.  
Isn't sunlight on those rusty fire-escapes a deeper gold;  
Something more than mere sunlight,—the very soul of  
things  
Coaxed out of the iron?  
Is that ugly?  
That dreamy-eyed little ragamuffin urinating so contempla-  
tively on the pavement,  
Patterning that square patch of sunlight into circles and  
ellipses  
With such intense absorption —  
Or is it — what? . . .  
Everywhere, always, if one but look;  
If one but tear the callous crust off one's eyes and let life  
shine through —  
Life always is Beauty and Beauty is Life —  
Keats said very much the same thing if I remember;  
Only there isn't much trace of it in his poetry.  
Well,  
I don't blame you, John Keats.  
Some people don't care to strain their eyes that way.  
You need steeled sight;  
An obstinacy of vision that melts the hard edge of things  
like compressed fire  
And fuses them into beauty.  
It's so much easier to make it up yourself,  
Out of yourself —  
Rather than to wrest it out of stubborn facts.

Of course,  
There is a recompense for the harder work;  
A higher beauty, a deeper truth —  
I like to think so.  
But sometimes —  
Sometimes I weary of it so!  
The adjusting and reconciling and harmonizing of shrieking  
dissonances.  
Something fails in me;  
And Reality breaks through like a jagged rock,  
Coarse and hard and merciless.  
The streets cut through me and narrow me into squalid  
alleys;  
The tenements crowd into and divide my mind into little  
dingy rooms;  
And people walk up and down through me with unheeding  
feet  
And wear me into shallow ruts,  
And trample the delicacy out of my innermost self.  
Then I want to divest myself of Reality as of a dirty shirt,  
To give up the dingy rooms and squalid alleys of my soul;  
And retreat into a world of my own making —  
Deep, deep within;  
Far, far away —  
Yet so familiarly my own.  
A world by the blue sea, framed between Ionic columns;  
Where there are no stunting tenements, no narrowing streets,  
no pettifying cares.  
A world of trees and temples, peopled by immortal youths  
Whose duty is but to live beautifully all their lives;  
And be initiated into pagan mysteries day by day,  
By the skies and the seas and the winds and the trees;  
By the sun and the moon and the stars and the flowers

And the subtle-sensed bodies of women and men. . . .  
But that doesn't last long,  
And proves:  
Merely that poets are too lazy to live and think at the same  
time;  
So they take a vacation from life.  
I have come to this after much thinking:  
Beauty, rhythm, harmony, and so forth —  
These are but the garments that life tries to cover herself  
with,  
As artists hide themselves behind poems, pictures, sonatas.  
Only through rifts in the beauty, through breaks in the  
rhythm, can one see her wonderful, dissonant soul —  
(Tragedy or comedy we call it when that happens)  
Therefore a good motto might be:  
One needs a keen ear for dissonance to be an artist.

## PASTEL: FROM THE WILLIAMSBURGH BRIDGE

SUBTLY, swiftly, mysteriously,  
Like the memory of some wonderful dream,  
The sunset fades out of the emblazoned west —  
Sinking behind the massed tower-peaks of Manhattan,  
Lower, and fainter and further.  
The grey sky darkens overhead,  
Turning into pale green;  
Deepening  
Darker and darker and darker —  
Until it is one vast canopy of blue,  
Glowing with a soft satiny sheen.  
A purple haze gathers in the air,  
Expanding slowly;  
Settles on the river and on the bridges and on the roof  
tops,  
Downward,  
Like a cloud of colored smoke —  
Smoothing out their harsh outlines;  
Harmonizing them into dark masses.  
One after another,  
Like the points of diamond needles,  
The stars pierce through the blue canopy of the sky;  
The lights of the city come out to meet them,  
Sparkling more brilliantly as the haze deepens —

Clustering around the vague outlines of the buildings;  
Like fireflies;  
Crowning the tall heads of the towers  
Like tiaras;  
Stretching in gold chains across the river  
On either side of the bridgeways.  
Dimly gigantic  
Like the trunks of headless Titans  
The bridge towers rise from the river bed —  
Steel-limbed and stone-footed  
Standing astride the bridge.  
The river flows between them,  
Under the curving sweep of the bridges,  
Against the clustering lights of the wharves —  
Heavy and sluggish with darkness,  
Like a black marsh.

## THE FIRE-GARDEN

“I’M just going down the cellar  
To throw a few shovelfuls of coal into the furnace —  
Will you come along?  
I think the fire is low.”  
He flung the door back  
Flooding the cellar with yellow light  
From the gas-lit kitchen.  
“Yes,  
Let’s go down;  
It’s always good to be on the safe side before going to bed,  
And it’s going to be a cold night.”  
The stairs creaked under our feet as we stepped carefully  
down.  
“You can shut the door behind you;  
There is a light there in the corner,  
I’ll just turn it on a little more.”  
The little ball of fire burning out of the gas-tip  
Lengthened into a thin long jet,  
Stabbing into the blackness like a knife-blade.  
A faint draft coming from somewhere in the cellar  
Wrestled with it for a while,  
Blowing it backward and forward.  
“Haven’t you ever been in our cellar before?”  
He opened the furnace door.  
I stepped back,

Tense and thrilled —

(You feel that way in a theatre

When the curtain lifts suddenly over the footlights.)

“ Well, that’s splendid! ”

Like a garden of fiery flowers

(Staged in a theatre or painted on a panel)

The red mouth of the furnace glowed in the darkness —

Red and white and gold and blue,

A hundred little flames frisked about it like elves,

Nodding with their forked heads,

Tumbling over each other lightly,

Swaying in a rhythmic dance.

“ It’s a shame to spoil this thing;

Don’t throw any coal on the fire now —

You’ll choke it.”

“ Oh, it’ll be all right in a moment —

Fire must be fed, you know.”

As he spoke

He thrust his shovel into the coal;

The coals came clattering down from the top of the heap.

“ I wonder whether they heard it? ”

“ Who? ”

“ The dancers.”

“ It hasn’t interrupted the dance any.”

He lifted a shovelful of coal

And swung it heavily into the furnace —

The fire went out under the black mass

As if under a blow;

The garden withered into pale smoke;

The dancers disappeared suddenly.

Then another shovelful;

Then another —

“ Oh, you’ve choked it all up! ”

“ It’ll be all right in a moment;  
See —”  
Slowly,  
Regaining consciousness,  
Blue tongues of flame clambered out of the coals —  
Darting here and there  
As if looking for something;  
Meeting together;  
Joining hands joyfully —  
Then red, then white, then gold,  
And the whole furnace was aglare again.  
“ There’s your dance again  
Going on as merrily as before —  
Come,  
Let’s close the furnace  
And leave them;  
There’s enough coal there  
To keep the dance going all night —  
Did you ever read Poe’s ‘ Masque of the Red Death ’? ”  
“ Yes; why? ”  
“ I was just thinking about it.”  
He closed the furnace door with a bang.

I went to bed that night  
With the furnace glowing red in my brain,  
As it glowed there in the cellar  
Within its iron heart.  
Half thinking, half dreaming,  
I thought of the dancers dancing all night  
Among the fiery flowers of the furnace  
Unseen, unheard.  
I wondered whether they were really happy  
Dancing all night;

Or whether they just pretended —  
I thought of the coals dying of their own fire,  
And wondered.  
When I fell asleep  
I dreamt that I was sitting in a theatre,  
Vast and dark and empty —  
Watching the performance of a mystic play,  
Going on interminably, invisibly,  
Behind the luminous curtain of the stage.

## ON THE BRIDGE

A-GLARE with electric lights,  
Like a great, luminous bug,  
The car crawled through the steel meshes of the bridge-  
way —  
Carrying its unheeding passengers with it through the night,  
As if on some mysterious errand.  
The passengers packed it to the doors;  
Squeezed between each other on the benches on both sides;  
Holding to the worn leather straps over the benches;  
Pressed against each other in the aisle.  
The air was heavy with their breath.  
Three girls in shabby red coats stood chattering together;  
Gossiping about the foreman and the new designer of  
their shop.  
A dark, slight girl and a spectacled young man stood un-  
comfortably face to face —  
Their bodies crushed closely together;  
Their eyes evading each other bashfully.  
A bearded, round-faced man sat reading a newspaper  
With square Hebrew print.  
The car quickened its motion imperceptibly.  
Two college boys sat talking together;  
Comparing notes carefully on the last biology lecture.  
A pale tired-faced girl sat beside them reading  
Some yellow-covered novel by Turgenev.

Next to her was a stout girl with a millinery box on her  
knees;

A young man leaned over her on a strap,

Staring hungrily into her bulging bosom

Through her unbuttoned coat and low shirtwaist. . . .

Over her head,

Through a clean space in the window,

The night sparkled like a crown —

River and city and sky,

Set with a million jewels.

## FROM THE JERSEY BANK

WEARILY,  
The River stretches its broad breast,  
Northward and southward,  
Dozing between its banks.  
Ferries,  
Lone-funneled and ugly  
Furrow its blue surface constantly —  
Sending up black streamers of smoke against the hazy sky  
Glowing with the last colours of the sunset.  
Tug-boats  
With engines incessantly clicking,  
Ply busily up and down —  
Dragging the long, heavy barges behind them.  
Occasionally  
Stately liners pass royally among them,  
Three-funneled and huge,  
Challenging the tall towers on the opposite shore. . . .  
But the River ignores them all,  
Flowing slowly between the tall towers on one side and  
the tall crags on the other —  
Slowly, moodily, reluctantly,  
Into the far-off, inevitable Sea.

## NOVEMBER

### I

FEARLESSLY,  
They thrust their dry branches against the sky;  
Long since the wind rifled their blossoms  
And scattered their foliage on the ground —  
Now they stand sternly erect,  
Naked and strong,  
Having nothing to lose.

### II

They strew the ground,  
Drifting into long, shallow banks,  
Piling into deep red mounds,  
Eddying under the trees —  
Aimlessly —  
Long since the wind wilted them with its breath  
And tore them from their twigs —  
Now they are free,  
Having no need to grow.

# THE NEUROLOGICAL INSTITUTE

## I

A TALL, red narrow-chested building,  
Anaemic-looking and old;  
It lifts its steepled head above the block,  
Fearful of its own height.

## II

A line,  
Men, women, children,  
(Alas for humanity!)  
All in their Sunday best,  
Hiding a hundred ailments under their clothes —  
Pushing and jostling and shuffling,  
Wait for the doors to open.

## III

First shall be last and last shall be first'—  
If you fellows would only read your Bible,  
For one thing you wouldn't be pushing like that.  
Look at me:  
I'm not pushing,  
But you'll see who'll be treated first.  
Old man? . . .  
Who's an old man?  
You wouldn't take me to be over thirty, would you?  
You better not.  
Maybe you think I'm going here because I'm sick?

Certainly not;  
This place happens to be an hour's walk from my house,  
So I take a walk here every Wednesday.  
Don't be talking so much against the rich people, young  
fellow,  
I'm one of them;  
It's beastly cold, though;  
Left my overcoat behind, by a mistake, you know."

IV

A nurse appears in the hall  
The doors swing open.

V

Baldheaded and clean-shaven,  
With folds of cheek and chin  
Like a well-washed hog,  
He sits behind the railing,  
(How many years?)  
Quavering solemnly:  
"What is your name?  
Are you willing to pay one dollar for your examination?  
Where were you born?  
How old are you? "  
His face has set into a questioning stare,  
Eyes, ears, mouth,  
Interrogatively wide.

VI

She sits beside him  
Filling the cards out,  
Collecting the money from the patients,  
Snapping alternately:

“Find yourself a seat,  
Doctor or treatment?  
Find yourself a seat.”  
Her face is dried and hollowed,  
Her lips are thin and bloodless,  
Her voice is like the crackling of briars.

VII

A steam-heated hot-house  
With souls instead of plants,  
On rows of chairs.  
If all the pain upon those chairs would speak!  
If all the souls within this room were bared!

VIII

School-marm turned nurse,  
Pretty and conscious of it.  
She bosses the patients about like little children,  
Seating them here and there,  
Calling them constantly to order:  
“Look here, you,  
I want you to stop talking;  
Find yourself a seat —  
There are plenty of chairs in the back;  
Heavens, what a chatterbox!  
Can’t you, please, stop talking?”  
She’s pretty, though  
From the tip of her shoe to the top of her cap,  
Face and figure perfect.

IX

How strange she seems  
Standing there by her desk,  
[84]

Tall and well-formed  
Like a stately poplar,  
Amid a tropic swamp.

X

If those lips were mine to kiss  
And that hair were mine to touch,  
And those breasts were mine to crush  
For one wild moment —  
I could half forget the pain  
That walls me out from Life.

XI

From the steaming jaws of hell,  
Clear and sweet and sudden,  
A child's treble:  
"Mamma,  
Why does that man wear that black thing over his eyes?  
Can he see through it?  
Look, mamma,  
When I'll be a big boy  
Then could I walk then,  
Like when we used to live in Brooklyn?  
Yes, Mamma?  
Then I could go in a shop  
And make ten dollars a week,  
Like papa.  
Wouldn't you be glad if I make ten dollars a week?  
I'm tired, Mamma,  
Why doesn't the doctor take us in?  
Maybe he isn't here?  
Where does the doctor live?  
Does he live here?

Mamma,  
Come home;  
I want to go home,  
Come

XII

A face framed in black curls,  
Restless roaming eyes  
Under a bulging brow,  
Deep set;—  
He stabs me with his beauty,  
That little boy.  
His mother holds him in her arms,  
Listening to his querulous prattling,  
Blandly, indifferently;  
From time to time  
Chiding him in a low voice,  
Readjusting his fretful body on her lap.  
Her face is like moulded wax.

XIII

Rembrandt Van Rijn,  
God's photographer,  
Artist-in-ordinary to His Majesty, Life,  
He would have painted them well:  
This "Mother and Child."  
Painted them just as they sit there  
With all this crowded clinic for a background,  
He would have called it with divine simplicity:  
"A Woman holding a Boy on Her Lap."

XIV

"Charity,  
That's what they call charity.

First they keep you shiverin' two hours outside,  
Then they keep you chokin' two hours here.  
Look at that woman.  
Is it her fault that her child's paralyzed?  
Is it her fault that she hasn't got no money?  
I'll tell you what,  
If she had money she wouldn't be waitin' here like that —  
With that kid in her arms, too.  
I don't care about myself, I tell you.  
I got the Fits —  
Epilepsy they call it;  
Got it ten years;  
But I don't give a damn about myself —  
It's the kid —  
Why should the kid have tha' mis'ry?  
It ain't done anybody no harm;  
There's somethin' wrong, I tell you."

XV

A big muscular-looking man of about forty,  
Long-faced and weather-beaten,  
With fierce, gray eyes.  
Epilepsy!  
So, he's got epilepsy.  
He might as well have told me:  
"I am the crater of Mt. Vesuvius,  
Got the Eruptions, you know."

XVI

"Been going here long?  
First time, eh?  
Well, you'll see  
A bunch of fakers.

They ain't know nothin'—nothin' about me leastways,  
Give me some dope for my nerves!  
I ain't nervous —  
I drive the craziest hunks o' horseflesh in the town.  
Couldn't drive 'em a block, if I was nervous.  
I know what I got it from —  
Got it from goin' with the women too much,  
But what the hell!  
I ain't gonna' begin to go to Sunday School now,  
Too old a buck.  
I was born from the women so I'll die from the women.  
Whaddya' say?  
There goes my name —  
Yes, doctor —  
Good-bye, young un."

## XVII

On the nurse's desk  
The telephone rings;  
She drops her work.  
"Hello,  
Who is that?  
Oh, is that you, Paul?  
I had forgotten all about you.  
What are you doing with yourself?  
Oh!  
Listen, Paul,  
I've heard strange rumors about you. . . .  
Yes, strange rumors.  
Somebody told somebody else that you're going to marry  
somebody.  
You heard what I said, alright.  
Well, I'm sort of curious to know. . . .

Who?  
Me?  
What do you mean by saying that to me?  
I have half a mind to drop the receiver right now. . . .  
No!  
Can't see you to-night.  
Yes, to punish you. . . .  
It all depends.  
I'll see how you behave. . . .  
Flatterer!  
I said you were a flatterer.  
No.  
Because I don't want to.  
Did you really get the tickets already?  
I don't believe you. . . .  
What's playing?  
It's your luck it's 'Lohengrin.'  
Listen, Paul, I'm dreadfully busy.  
Call me up a little later,  
About five.  
Yes.  
Good-bye.  
Don't be silly!  
I said you were a silly boy.  
Good-bye."

XVIII

She picks up her work:  
Filing some "histories"  
Looking some up in the catalogue.  
Paul!  
I wonder who he is,  
Some healthy young male,

Tall and good-looking  
With a good-looking income  
Or prospect of such.  
Paul,  
If you could make those cheeks rosier,  
And those eyes brighter,  
And those hands nervous,  
I envy you, Paul!

XIX

So, he's my fellow patient —  
That idiot boy there,  
Staring at me with his huge glassy eyes,  
Half vacantly, half recollectively,  
Then bursting into a loud chuckle.  
It's he.

XX

He lives across the clothes-lines  
On the third floor of the opposite tenement,  
Forming the rear of our yard.  
All day long the yard resounds with him —  
Either laughing like a satyr  
Or braying like an animal in pain.  
He's about fifteen,  
Dark and hatchet-faced,  
With a moustache sprouting under his snout-like nose.  
His mouth is open as he stares at me,  
Showing two rows of teeth.  
Disgustingly foul.

XXI

A girl enters the room  
And seats herself down in a chair,

Just in front of my own.  
I caught a glimpse of her face  
As she turned to look at the clock,  
And the warmth of her big black eyes,  
And the delicate curve of her nose,  
Stabbed through my head like a knife.

XXII

I remember a January afternoon,  
Cold and wet and foggy,  
When we strolled through the snow-covered Park.  
Her arm was tight in my own  
As we strolled through the ghastly lawns.  
“Look,  
Isn’t it wonderful? ”  
“ Yes,” I answered,  
Looking aside at her face.  
“ Do you know,  
I love the Park in Winter.”  
“ Yes,” I trembled,  
Tightening her arm in my own,  
I remember a January afternoon,  
Cold and wet and foggy.  
This was my June.

XXIII

I am tired of waiting.  
Life’s the waiting-room of a clinic  
And I suppose the doctor is Death,  
And the grave must be behind the little door marked  
“ Private.”  
I think I’m going to faint;  
My head swims. . . .

A baby tumbles from her mother's arms,  
On the hard, stone floor —  
God!  
The white door of the little room marked "Private" opens;  
A man in a black suit comes out;  
My name is called!

XXIV

"What's your complaint?  
Pains in the back of your head?  
My dear boy, how do you know it's terrific?  
Don't sleep, eh?  
Is that so?  
Anything been happening to worry you lately,  
Any affairs of yours gone wrong?  
Been jilted by your sweetheart, perhaps?  
Nothing of that, eh?  
Let's examine your heart;  
Open your shirt up,  
Way up.  
More!  
Your heart's all right.  
Are you leading a normal life?  
How about your appetite?  
Is that so?  
Take these pills four times a day,  
After every meal and at bedtime;  
There's nothing the matter with you —  
Nothing organic, that is,  
Just functional nervousness.  
You'll be alright,  
Good-bye."

## TO-DAY

TO-DAY

The wind goes sighing through the streets;  
Prowling stealthily into each open door;  
Tapping at the windows;

Like a maniac,  
Searching, searching —  
For what it knows not!

To-day  
My soul goes sighing through my heart;  
Prowling into old familiar corners;  
Treading long-forsaken byways  
And looking backward  
Fearfully —

Why?

## THE FIDDLER

LIKE Nero of old  
I sit amid the ruins of my life,  
Fiddling in tune  
While my soul is on fire —

Poet! Poet! Poet!  
Incorrigible Poet!

## CROWDS

CROWDS!

I am shy —

Yet I love crowds —

I love to plunge into a crowd as a swimmer plunges into the  
sea;

I love to feel against my ribs the rough pressure of life;

I love to push and be carried along with the tide —

I love the rude shoulders of men.

Crowds!

I am a dreamer —

Yet I love crowds —

I love to hear in my soul the rhythmic jar of existence;

Only in the crush of the mart can I build my dreams;

Only in the noise of the street can I find my songs —

I love the harsh voices of men.

Crowds!

I love crowds —

Yet in the midst of them,

I am lonely.

## GROTESQUE

### CLEAVING

The darkness of the night  
Two spires shoot upward;  
Two spires of fretted stone.  
Behind them  
The long gray body of the great Cathedral  
Squats like a Beast.

There is something threatening in your strength;  
There is something sinister about your strange magnifi-  
cence —

Grim, gray Beast!  
Is it the ghost of dead Faith still haunting me?  
Is it the power of old spells still binding me?  
I have seen you standing strong  
Under the high stars,  
And revelled in your might.  
I have seen you rising  
Coldly — clear  
Under the cold moon,  
And worshipped your beauty.  
Tonight  
This beauty is an apparition  
Challenging me,  
Maddening me,  
Defying my soul with its strength.

Ah, that I could take you in my hands and break you  
    between my palms,  
Great Beast!  
With the vehemence of my hate  
Encircle my arms about you and crush you in my embrace.  
How stolid you stand! —  
How insolently calm,  
Buttressed with strong, stupid masses of stone,  
And strong, stupid masses of soul,  
Tauntingly, flauntingly firm —  
Beast! Beast! Beast!  
Gray-coated Leprosy,  
Charnel-house,  
Urinal,  
Carved for the worship of God  
Where big-bellied Bishops and Cardinals  
Empty themselves of their lies. . . .  
Avaunt!  
How filthy you are  
With putrid odors;  
The stench of decayed superstitions reeks from your  
    haunches.  
Hypocrisy shines on your face like a bloated boil  
Ripe for the scalpel —  
Ah!  
If I could only prick that boil with the point of my pen  
And squeeze out the pus with some forceps  
Exposing the sore,  
That all the world might see it  
Even as I —  
How loathsome you are!  
The poisonous breath of your mouth corrupts the air  
Like a pestilence.  
I choke,

I faint with its fumes,  
I fall, fall, fall —  
Endlessly,  
Into the torpor of death,  
Into the horror of hell —  
Endlessly. . . .  
Beast! Beast! Beast!  
Gray Beast with the ravenous maw  
Devouring my soul,  
Avaunt — Avaunt!

## A CLUMP OF PINES: MOUNT MORRIS PARK

LIKE swarthy young gods  
The pines rise from the sloped forehead of the hill;  
Looking upward over its bald top  
Into the downward curving sky  
That frames it in a blue infinity.  
Behind them  
The trees straggle up the hillside  
With naked branches waiting to be budded —  
Impatient of Spring.  
Wantonly,  
The birches spread their white limbs in the sunshine;  
The poplars sway with tender passion;  
The young oaks stand taut with desire.  
Behind them  
The lawns lie bellied out under the sunshine —  
Each faded grass-blade impregnated with new life.  
Children play on the walks.  
Full-bosomed young mothers  
With moist breasts crushed under their coats  
Sit on the benches beside the baby-carriages.  
At the bottom  
The City spreads like a besieging army,  
Petrified into massed blocks — manacled by long streets  
As it surged forward.

The houses glare impotently at the hill  
Out of their sun-dazzled eyes.  
The churches lift up their steeples among them like stand  
ards.  
But the pines rise in their fenced copse on the hill-side  
Solemnly apart —  
Over the massed houses and challenging steeples;  
Over the warm placid lawns and restless spring-stirred trees  
Standing as in a sacred grove,  
And looking fixedly over the hill  
Into the infinite abysmal blue.

## ON A PARK BENCH

UNDER the green-bosomed chestnuts bulging into the drive-  
way

She sat there —

Big-bodied and immobile as the trees;

Ripening in the warm insinuating sunshine

Like a huge plant.

Feverishly

The automobiles hurried after each other before her vacant  
unheeding eyes —

Sparkling into view like sudden suns

And darkening out of sight.

Like a moving tapestry

The equestrians swept after each other across the drive —

Shining brown haunches, polished black boots gleaming  
through the leaves.

The birds darted through the sunlight like fishes

Riddling it with a million melodious trills.

She sat there

Rooted to the bench,

Feeling only the bulging mystery in her womb,

Dull-eyed and grandly immobile,

Growing with the green lawns and the silent sap-veined  
trees.

## THE PLAY POND: CENTRAL PARK

UNDER the dazzling sweep of sun-burnished blue skies  
The pond blinks between the recumbent hills,  
Rippling ceaselessly away  
From the whirlpool of white fire  
Flaming on the further side.  
Saturated with light  
The trees climb down the bent backs of the hills  
With drooping heads and faint limbs —  
Pale from the weariless lust of the sun  
Like raped women.  
Out of its great round eye  
The pond gapes piteously at the trees.  
Like a quarry seeking shelter,  
In frantic ripples  
It scurries under the explosive, blinding sparkle  
Groping at its planked rim,  
With little lapping tongues —  
But the trees are far and helpless  
Ravished with sunlight  
And the hot, hard planks are merciless as the sun.  
Nearby  
Across the scorched backs of the hills  
The mansions sit back comfortably on the broad sidewalk  
of the Avenue —  
With well-shaded eyes

Watching the tortured pond struggling under the glare  
Like a pinned butterfly.  
On the green benches ranged around the pond  
Women sit in white groups —  
Reading, knitting;  
With lowered eyelids  
Evading the blazing pond.

Beside the rim of the pond  
A red-haired little boy squats on his brown chubby hands  
With eager lips and unblinking blue eyes,  
Watching a wilful breeze driving his toy schooner,  
Against the feverish ripples fleeing from the fire —  
Cruelly, swiftly,  
Into the heart of the flaming whirlpool.

## THE DESERTED CHURCH

It has stood that way for years,  
Awesomely empty —  
A flat-roofed lumbering structure in the shape of a half  
    cross,  
Jutting out of the block at the corner of two busy avenues;  
The long head of the cross stretching towards the street  
With a sign on the door telling passers-by it is for sale;  
The two arms receding awkwardly into the block.  
Weed-covered grounds —  
One boasting of a tree —  
Flank the long head of the cross  
On either side.  
Windows,  
Tall, narrow slits  
With broken panes and curved tops,  
Stare gravely into the ground like owls —  
The building stands there like a tomb  
Deserted of its God.

I pass it sometimes on my way to the library,  
At night  
When gray clouds sail over its flat roof like shrouded souls,  
And the yellow moon shines down from among the clouds,  
On its bare, brown walls,  
Through its tall, dilapidated windows,  
On the gaunt spare-branched tree.

Then I am almost afraid of it —  
I am afraid of the God that is haunting His old home. . . .  
If I were bold enough to climb over that fence  
And steal up close to one of those windows,  
And look through its broken panes —  
I think I would see Him sweeping up and down the chancel,  
Seeking vainly for His old worshippers,  
Listening vainly for the blessed sound of the Mass,  
Forever hushed —  
Yes,  
God's ghost is haunting this gloomy church —  
I am afraid of it!

Soon,  
An enterprising Jew will buy up the property,  
And turn it into a moving-picture house —  
(Jews are not afraid of God because they created Him.)  
“*The Vitagraph Palace*” or “*The Art Motion Pictures*”  
or “*The Lee Avenue Theatre*” or some other name  
Will glare in electric letters over the door;  
Signs and posters all around the building will tell the public  
what is playing.  
At night,  
Sweethearts from the cosmopolitan neighborhood will sit  
together in the aisles,  
Playing secretly with each other's hands in the dark,  
Flirting together in a dozen different languages,  
While the hero and heroine make love to each other on the  
screen,  
Where once the altar stood.  
Gayety and pleasure shall crowd into every nook of the  
church,  
And God's ghost shall be driven out.

## MY BELOVÉD

At night  
When I am asleep,  
My Belovéd comes to me  
And falls upon my breast  
And caresses me —  
Calls me her Poet, her Artist, her Soul;  
Calls me her Genius, her Saviour, her God —  
I crush her in my arms  
And kiss her  
And bite her  
Amorously —  
I may not hint at half the joy we have;  
I may not tell of half the love we share;  
At night!

In the daytime  
I sit beside her,  
Sometimes,  
And talk to her  
Bashfully  
About all sorts of things —  
Literature, Art, Philosophy  
She listens,  
Sometimes —  
I am a very queer fellow  
She thinks.

## A BROOKLYN BY-STREET

Two straight rows of low brick buildings —  
Interminably red, interminably neat, interminably double-  
storied;  
Fronted with the same brown porches and the same small  
grass plots,  
Stare at each other across the street,  
Placidly,  
Out of a hundred windows.  
Automobiles  
Race between them intermittently;  
Delivery-wagons  
Rattle by from the markets  
Stopping at some of the porches;  
A boy alights from a wagon  
Carrying a parcel —  
He is tall and freckle-faced —  
A girl in a white dress is sitting on one of the porches,  
Reading a yellow-bound book. . . .  
I wonder what she is reading —  
A story or an essay or a poem,  
A novel or a play!  
I think she is reading a poem:  
Her eyes are so open and restless,  
Her lips are so languidly pensive —  
I am sure she is reading a poem.

If I wanted  
 I could walk up that porch and speak to her.  
 I know  
 She wouldn't mind it.  
 I would walk up those steps and say to her, smilingly:  
 "Pardon me . . . but . . .  
 May I ask you —  
 What are you reading? "  
 (I can almost see her,  
 Lifting her face from the book,  
 Startled somewhat!)  
 "Some poetry. . . . Swinburne's . . . . my favorite."  
 "Mine, too."  
 "Do you like him? "  
 "I love him;  
 He's a wonderful wizard of words! "  
 And . . .  
 "Did you read his 'Garden of Proserpine'? "  
 "I was reading it now for the twentieth time —  
 I'm crazy about it! "  
 And . . .  
 "Did you read them? —  
 Laus Veneris, Dolores, Fragoletta, Faustine,  
 Anactoria, Hertha, Aholibah, Thalassius? "  
 "All! "  
 "What marvellous word-woven tapestries all;  
 What palaces builded of sound,  
 Oriental, Ionic and Gothic;  
 In color, melody, rhythm,  
 In power and passion of words,  
 There's no one like Swinburne! "  
 And . . .  
 "Do you remember the opening chorus

In 'Atalanta in Calydon'?  
A Greek might have written it —  
(Apologetically)  
You see,  
I know these things  
Being a poet myself —"  
"A poet!  
You?"  
And . . .  
If I wanted  
I could walk up those steps and speak to her  
All this and much more . . .  
But something  
Out of a hundred hooded windows  
Staring complacently —  
Cowers me and drives me away  
Abashed.

I wonder what she is reading! . . .

## NOCTURNE: FIFTH AVENUE AND CENTRAL PARK

THE omnibus moved joltingly up the Avenue  
Double-storied and top-heavy;  
Shaking the drowsy passengers on the roof,  
Sideward and forward.  
The sky curved over us like a dim dome,  
Moonless and murky,  
Indefinitely deep.  
A few stars struggled out of the thick mists  
And followed us.  
On one side slept the Park —  
A long, black mass of trees,  
Facing the Avenue and melting backward into the blacker  
sky.  
On the other side stretched the white mansions of the  
Avenue,  
With blinds pulled down and curtains drawn close,  
Big and empty looking.  
The omnibus moved joltingly up the Avenue.  
Tall, curved lamp-posts,  
With great electric globes bulging from their bent heads,  
Challenged us on either side like sentinels.  
The Avenue stretched endlessly before us,  
Shining under their white glare,  
Like a moonlit river.

## WINTER NOCTURNE: THE HOSPITAL

A MASS of ledged rock  
Steep and brown and long  
Ribbed with white streaks of snow  
Rises up suddenly from among level blocks of tenements,  
Lifting the red hospital buildings on its top,  
Higher  
Over the huddled heads of the tenements  
Over the uncoiled length of the Elevated  
Up to the very disc of the moon.

## AFTER THE LECTURE

I AM sick of believing and disbelieving —  
Cults and creeds and systems of thought;  
Philosophy, Morality, Cosmology, concern me no more —  
Let the eternal verities go to the dogs!  
Enough has been prattled about them —  
Aristotle, Socrates, Plato;  
Fichte and Hegel and Schelling and Kant.  
It is all so simple to me —  
I know it is Good to be out under the stars tonight,  
And Evil to be pent up in a sultry lecture room.  
I know it is Good to be walking beside you, dear,  
And Evil of you to be philosophising so much.  
I know it is Right to put my arms around you and kiss you,  
And Wrong of you to deny me that kiss.  
As to who made this ramshackle, top-heavy Universe,  
Dear little girl,  
Let God have the credit.

## NOCTURNE: CENTRAL PARK

THE snow souged ceaselessly through the air  
In long thin threads like rain,  
Ceaselessly, softly descending,  
On the white sheeted trees with their freighted branches  
Bending under the full moon;  
On the undulating, creamy lawns  
Glistening in the moonlight;  
On the frozen surface of the Pond  
Gleaming from behind the trees  
Like a sheet of lacquered silver.  
Clouds,  
Big-bellied and fluffy  
Like great grey whales  
Sailed across the blue arch of the sky,  
Brushing against the round disk of the moon,  
Putting out the stars in their path  
Like sputtering matches —  
Only the moon shone steadfastly in the sky  
Like a lighthouse set among the clouds.

We stood together,  
Made one in each other's arms —  
Under the low-bending branches of the sheeted trees,  
Under the gray-dappled moonlit sky —  
Her eyes shone through me like two moons

Lighting up strange vistas within my brain;  
Her soft cheek pressed warmly against my own;  
A stray wisp of black hair fell from under her hat,  
Caught between my lips, and filled my nostrils with an  
    odor of crushed flowers —  
And the snow soughed coolingly on our hot faces.

## SPRING TRYST

WHAT shall I say to her first,  
As she comes tripping to meet me,  
Here at our tryst in the Park —  
Comes with her wide hat aslant  
And her brown eyes glowing beneath —  
What shall I say to her first!

Shall I put on a piteous face  
And pout:  
“ I have waited so long;  
The birds taunted me from the tree-tops as I stood here;—  
Chirping two, two, two, two, two,  
Silly, silly, silly, silly boy,  
She will never come — she will never come —  
See, you naughty birds,  
She *has* come! ”  
Or shall I look tenderly at her:  
“ You are tired, dear;  
Sit down . . .  
What a sweet dress you have on to-day;  
It goes so well with the Spring,  
The rose on your cheeks and the green on your dress;  
Only what shall we do with your eyes —  
They are so brown! ”  
Or shall I let my joy free,

Caged in my throat like a bird:  
“Darling,  
At last —  
I am so happy!  
All night I was wakeful thinking about you,  
And my heart kept ticking the seconds;  
I am so happy, so happy —  
I think I could fly!”  
Or shall I take her hand,  
Gently,  
And lead her down to the pond:  
“Do you remember the time we stood here —  
Here, under the very same trees,  
When the trees were sheeted in snow,  
And the pond was frozen across,  
And the wind bit into our faces —  
You jested:  
‘Do you know —  
We ought to draw up a petition to the Spring,  
All lovers,  
And ask him to hurry this way!’  
Do you remember?” . . .  
Or shall I not say anything at all to her,  
But clasp her in my trembling arms,  
And speak to her lips and her cheeks and her eyes and  
her brow —  
Where shall I kiss her first!

## AT THE FLORIST'S

THROUGH the big show window on the Avenue,  
The flowers called to me as I stopped —  
Piping and chirping and singing in a dozen different colors,  
Like a tree-top of bright-plumaged birds:  
“Take me to her, bring me with you, choose me for her;  
I am sweet, I am sweeter; but I am more beautiful, but I  
am more graceful.”  
I looked recollectively through the frosted glass.  
“You are familiar to me,” said I to a little red flower who  
was louder than the rest —  
“Aren’t you a jasmine? ”  
“Oh! ” trilled the little red flower impatiently through her  
creamy throat,  
“Only a month ago she passed here with you and told you  
my name —  
Take me along with you and I’ll forgive you for being so  
stupid.”  
“Take us too,” breathed a cloud of white flowerets in a  
corner —  
“Don’t you remember us?  
That time . . . on the Palisades . . . in June. . . .  
She passed her fingers through our stems to show us to  
you, and we glittered on them so —  
Like seed pearls, you said.”  
“And me —

Don't you remember me?" said a little yellow flower  
naughtily.

"She pinned me near her bosom that time, and you crushed  
me there with your kisses."

I blushed.

"I — I remember something like that, but I can't think of  
your names.

You see . . . one sees you so seldom in the city. . . .

Please excuse me this once;

When she gets well I'll —

And who are you?" turned I to a big crimson flower that  
interrupted my eye.

"Never mind my name," answered she drawing herself up  
haughtily on her tall stem,

"You'd forget it anyway if I told you —

Take me with you and she will know."

"Please take *me* to her," pleaded a little blue flower in a  
crowd of ferns.

"She never pointed me out to you, but I love her so much;

Take me along with you and make me happy —

I will look so beautiful in her hair!"

"I am truly sorry," confided I to the little blue flower as  
I walked away —

"I have only a dime for carfare and can't buy any of you  
for her —

But I will put you all in a poem and read it to her."

## A POSTSCRIPT

DEAREST!

When I pressed you to my heart that time  
And the impatient engine drowned our last good-bye  
I walked back through the station,  
Dizzy,  
Because of the kiss I carried,  
Poised tremulously,  
Like a bird upon my lips.  
Breathless,  
Lest my breath blow it off;  
Fearful,  
As one who bears a fragile treasure home;—  
I walked back through the crowded staring station  
Into the crowded staring street,  
With moist half-open lips —  
Until the shy bird spread her wings  
And flew within for shelter,  
Making my heart flutter with her wings.

## NOCTURNE

(FOR H. R.)

As we walked there by the park-wall  
The moon went with us all the way,  
Shining from behind the trees  
Big and round and yellow —  
Like a Chinese lantern  
Dangling from the dark sky  
By some invisible thread;  
As we walked there by the park-wall  
The moon followed us all the way,  
Big-faced and piteous,  
Like a wild creature  
Snared behind the impenetrable net-work of the trees;  
As we stopped there in the doorway  
The moon watched us all the time,  
Yellow-faced and envious  
Like a jealous lover  
Peering through the lattice of the trees.

## A ROW OF POPLARS: CENTRAL PARK

THE poplars stood in a straight row,  
Upright under the moon,  
Facing the broad sidewalk of the Avenue —  
Their tipped heads rising high over the park wall,  
Their slender bodies cutting sharply through the humid  
air,  
Like dark-draped statues.  
Elms,  
Thick-trunked and fan-shaped,  
Arched towards each other across the walk,  
Forming a leafy arcade by the park wall.  
Crowds sauntered through the arcade,  
In twos and threes and fours  
Streaming back and forth —  
Bevies of young girls,  
In light summer dresses, with hair curled roguishly over  
their ears,  
Laughing and chattering as they tripped along,  
Coquetting boldly with the boys;  
Plump-bodied, perspiring matrons trying to keep pace with  
their husbands,  
In stiff silk dresses and little straw hats;  
Sweethearts strolling arm-in-arm,  
Looking at each other happily,  
Oblivious of everything else.

At intervals  
On the long benches by the park wall,  
Couples sat huddled amorously together —  
Their intertwined shadows projecting into the walk,  
Under the passing feet.  
Nearby,  
On the other side of the park wall,  
The poplars stood in a straight row,  
Upright under the moon,  
Virginally slender —  
Holding themselves stiffly aloof.  
Afar  
The lake lay in the moonlight —  
Gold and black and silver  
Rippling together.

## THE OLD COURTESAN

(AFTER THE BRONZE CAST BY AUGUSTE RODIN)

SHE is old and ugly —  
Battered with years,  
Like an inn  
That life has deserted  
Long ago —  
Love once held revel in her heart;  
Youth once lay captive on those breasts;  
Now!  
She is old and ugly —  
Wrinkled with years,  
Like a grape  
That Life has squeezed out  
Over its cup —  
Time has pressed flat the fulness of her cheeks;  
Lust has sucked dry the sweetness of her lips;  
Now!  
She is old and ugly —  
Yellow with years,  
Like a parchment  
That life has scrawled over and over  
With villainous rhymes.

## PRIDE

YESTERDAY,  
Passing through the Bowery,  
I saw a dry crust of bread lying on a heap of offal,  
A big, starved-looking yellow cat was rummaging through  
the heap.  
She seemed to have noticed the crust of bread —  
Evidently it was too hard for her teeth.  
Just as I was turning the corner  
A tramp lurched by.  
He was not drunk,  
He was hungry —  
So he staggered as he walked.  
I stopped.  
My eyes fixed themselves on that heap of offal;  
And on the dry crust of bread lying on top of it;  
And on the old yellow cat rummaging beside it. . . .

The man stopped also;  
He was examining that heap of offal —  
His eyes wandered from the dry crust of bread to the old  
yellow cat.  
Something within him drew him to that heap of offal;  
Something within him revolted against it.  
The man hesitated —  
On the top of the heap squatted the old yellow cat —

Munching, munching, munching;  
The man hesitated —  
Finally he dragged himself away,  
Proudly.

## PSALM CLI

### I

PRAISE ye the Lord, O Nations!  
Praise ye the Lord with the bayonet and the bullet —  
Praise Him with the scattering of shrapnel, praise Him  
    with the throwing of hand-grenades —  
Praise, praise ye the Lord!

### II

Raise ye trenches on the hill-tops;  
Build ye fortifications on the high places of the earth;  
That ye may worship the Lord —  
Fittingly!

### III

Praise ye the Lord, for His vengeance consumeth the Nations;  
Praise ye the Lord, for His terror abideth forever;  
Praise Him with lyddite shells, praise Him with dum-dum  
    bullets, praise Him with nitro-glycerine bombs —  
Praise ye the Lord with light artillery and heavy artillery  
    and all manner of ordnance!

### IV

Praise ye the Lord with asphyxiating chlorine;  
Praise Him with the sacking of cities, praise Him with the

raping of women, praise Him with the slaughter of children —

Praise Him with zeppelins, aeroplanes, dirigibles —

Praise ye the Lord on the face of the earth, praise ye the Lord in the depths of the sea, praise ye the Lord from the heights of the air!

V

Praise ye the Lord with submarine torpedoes —

Praise Him with battleships, cruisers, destroyers without number;

Praise Him with floating mines and stationary mines;—

Praise ye the Lord on the face of the earth, praise ye the Lord in the depths of the sea, praise ye the Lord from the heights of the sky!

VI

Praise ye the Lord, O Nations of the earth —

All ye that are dreaming of Peace and Brotherhood;

All ye that are praying for Justice and Law —

Let the guns of your dreadnoughts praise the Lord;

Let the mouths of your howitzers praise the Lord —

Praise, praise ye the Lord!

## A LOST LEADER

(FOR C. E. R.)

I SAW him once,  
In a great, hushed hall,  
Where thousands held their breath to hear him —  
Thousands of tired faces made eager with hope,  
Listening, believing, worshipping.  
His voice was like an insistent trumpet call;  
His bold frank face shone under his gray hair,  
Like the face of some warrior saint;  
And his fixed eyes flamed out of their deep sockets.  
And I thought of Christ addressing the multitude on the  
Mount;  
And I thought of One crying in the wilderness;  
And I waited there,  
To touch his hand,  
And look into his face;  
So beautiful it was.

Christ turned Judas —  
Christ himself,  
Reviling his own disciples,  
Betraying them — for what!  
He who cried to us in the wilderness;  
He who preached to us on the Mount;

Is this the same?  
One with our foes at the Council  
One with our Lords at the feast —  
He who was the seven-fold trumpet blast,  
Around the Jericho of Greed —  
Now that the walls are crumbling;  
Now that the city is ours —  
Deserting our hosts in the battle;  
Crowning our triumph with shame;—  
This is a great defeat!

## TO RUSSIA—1917

RUSSIA! Russia!

Sweet, vast, strong-shouldered Russia,  
With the subtle soul and the simple, guileless heart —

I never knew I loved you,

Until this — your Day of Truth,

When your soul flared up through the leaden chains that  
bound you

And melted them like fire —

Melted the king's crown upon your head, melted the priest's  
cross in your hand;

Shrivelled the black robes around your limbs;

And you stood up among the nations,

Naked and beautiful,

Innocent,

As if Tyranny had never touched you.

Ah, how I watched you then!

How I looked at your beauty unrobed at last

Tenderly, reverently,

As I look at the body of my own love.

But when you picked up from the earth

The fallen torch of freedom,

And held it on high,

For all the world to see —

Then my tenderness became passion,

And my reverence became yearning,

And I knew that I was yours and you were mine,  
Mother and sweetheart and comrade of my soul!

Russia! Russia!

Take me to your heart again;  
Put your strong arms about me that I may feel them  
And be assured of your forgiveness;  
I have sinned against you greatly —  
I did not know you;  
I feared you,  
Because of the king's crown that you wore and the priest's  
cross that you held  
And the black robes that shrouded your limbs —  
I fled from you  
To an alien country across the sea;  
I learned her tongue and forgot your face;  
I thought her thoughts and sang her songs;  
And in your hour of trial I was not by your side,  
To think *your* thoughts and to sing *your* songs  
And to fight *your* fight —  
Forgive me!  
I saw only your black robes;  
I did not see the beautiful body beneath  
And the Diadem dazzled my eyes from your face —  
Now I know!  
Now I see!  
I will fly to you,  
And help you upbear in your arms  
The torch of the new-born Freedom  
That you hold for the world.  
I will learn your tongue and go in your ways,  
And breathe out on your steppes, in your forests,  
New York's fever and dust —

Turgenieff, Tolstoy, Dostoyeffsky, Gorki,  
Tcheckoff, Andreyeff, Pushkin,  
Souls of your living and dead,  
Immortal alike —  
I will sit at their feet and learn from them  
How to love you!  
I will watch their lips and follow their eyes;  
And perhaps,  
If I prove myself worthy to love,  
I will be admitted to the table —  
A humble guest.







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